

## Message Text

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TAGS: MASS, SA

SUBJECT: NEW YORK TIMES EDITOR,AL ON THE F-15

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF NEW YORK TIMES, FEB 16, EDITORIAL  
ON THE SALE OF THE F-15 TO SAUDI ARABIA.

2. BEGIN TEXT: EAGLES TO ARABIA - THE ONLY PART OF THE  
CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED PACKAGE OF AIRCRAFT SALES  
FO THE MIDDLE EAST THAT WOULD ALTER THE BALANCE OF FORCES  
THER: IS THE SALE OF 60 F-15 "EAGLE" FIGHTERS TO SAUDI  
ARABIA. IN MAKING THAT PROPOSAL, THE ADMINISTRATION IS  
GAMBLING THAT ;HE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL BENEFITS WOULD OUT-  
WEIGH THE LONG-TERM MILITARY RISKS. TO ISRAEL'S FEARS  
T;AT THESE POTENT LONG-RANGE INTERCEPTORS WOULD BE USED  
AGAINST IT ;N A FUTURE WAR, THE ADMINISTRATION RESPONDS  
THAT THE SALE WOULD MAK; RENEWED WAR LESS LIKELY. OUR  
HUNCH ;S THAT ;HE ADMINISTRATION HAS MADE THE RIGHT  
DECISION.

THERE IS NOTHING WORRISOME ABOUT THE TWO OTHER PARTS OF THE  
PACKAGE. THEY ARE, OR SR;EL, 15 ADDITIONAL F-15S (TO  
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SUPPLEMENT 25 ALREADY PURCHASED) AND 75 ADVANCED MULTI-ROLE  
F-16S, AND FOR EGYPT, 50 F-5E LIGHTWEIGHT INTERCEPTO;S.  
THIS WOULD MAKE CERTAIN THAT ISRAEL WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE

MU-H THE BEST AIR FORCE IN THE REGION. IT WOULD ENABLE  
EGYPT TO BEGIN REPLACING ITS AGING FORCE OF SOVIET  
FIGHTERS WITHOUT SIGNIFICANTLY AUGMENTING ITS ABILITY TO

GO ON THE OFFENSIVE.

BUT F-15S WOULD GIVE SAUDI ARABIA, -OR THE FIRST TIME, THE ABILITY TO DESTROY AIRCRAFT FAR FROM ITS OWN BORDERS. SUCH A R"NGE IS NECESSARY, EVEN WITHIN SAUDI ARABIA, TO PROTECT WIDELY DISPERSED OIL INSTALLATIONS AND CITIES. BUT IT WORRIES THE ISRAELIS, WHO FEAR THAT SAUDI F-15S COULD THEN ATTACK THEIR AIRCRAFT ALMOST ANYWHERE IN THE REGION. THEY WORRY TH;T THE SAUDIS, BYSTANDERS IN PREVIOUS ARAB-ISRAELI WARS, MAY GROW COMBATIVE AS THEY GROW MORE CAPABLE OF COMBAT.

THE ISRAELIS ALSO WORRY THAT THE "AUDIS MIGHT IN A MOMENT OF TENSION TRANSFER THEIR F-15S TO OTHER ARAB STATES, IN VIOLATION OF AMERICAN RESTRICTIONS. THAT WORRY, AT LEAST, SEEMS UNWARRANTED: AS THE WORLD'S MOST ;OPHISTICATED COMBAT AIRCRAFT, THE F-15 REQUIRES A FORMIDABLE ARRAY OF GROUND EQUIPMENT AND IS NOT EASY TO FLY. EVEN PILOTS WHO MIGHT MASTER IT COULD NOT HANDLE ITS WEAPONS SYSTEMS WITHOUT SCORES OF HOURS IN EXPENSIVE GROUND SIMULATORS. AND IT WOULD BE VIRT'ALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TRAIN OTHER NATIONS' PILOTS IN SAUDI ARABIA WITHOUT AMERICAN AND ISRAELI DETECTION.

THE FIRST EAGLES WOULD NOT REACH SAUDI ARABIA UNTIL 198,, AND THEY WOULD NOT BE OPERATIONAL FOR ANOTHER YEAR OR SO  
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"FTER THAT. UNTIL THEN, THE DEAL COULD BE HALTED, AS IT WOULD BE IF THERE WERE A DRASTIC CHANGE OF DIRECTION IN RIYADH.

BUT ;HE ,RESENT ORIENTATION OF THE SAUDI LEADERS IS IMPORTANT TO BOTH FORE;GN AND DOMEST;C INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES. THEI, COUNTRY'S VAST OIL RESERVES ARE CRUCIAL TO AMERICAN LONG-TERM ENE;GY PLANNING, AND THEY HAVE USED THEIR DOMINANT INFLU-NCE WITHIN OPEC TO KEEP OIL PRICES FROM RISING RAPIDLY. ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE THEIR DOUBTS ABOUT THE WAY PRESIDENT SADAT HAS GONE ABOUT TRYING TO MAKE PEA"E WITH ISRAEL, THEIR FINANCIAL SUPPOR; FOR EGYPT'S AILING ECONOMY HAS NOT WAVERED, AND IT IS D"UB FUL THAT HE COULD SURVIVE POLITICALLY WITHOUT IT. FOR ALL THESE REASONS, THE ADMINISTRATION SEES A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH RIYADH "S ESSENTIAL. IT FEELS THAT IT MUST RESPOND TO THE SAUDI FEARS OF POTENTIAL ATTACK BY RADICAL ARAB STATES, ESPEC,ALLY IRAQ, WHICH LIE 0EH,ND THE REQUEST FOR F-15S. AND IT BELIEVES THAT A REFUSAL, SIGNIFYING DISTR'ST, COULD CAUSE THE SAUDIS TO MODIFY SOME

OF THEIR POLICIES IN UNDESIRABLE WAYS.

ISRAELI FEARS OF F-15S IN SAUDI HANDS ARE UNDERSTANDABLE.  
BUT WITH OUT; WITHOUT SHIPMENTS OF EAGLES TO RIYADH, ISRAEL  
CANNOT HOPE TO REMAIN INDEFINITELY SUPERIOR TO ITS  
POTENTIAL ENEMIES IN ALL FORMS OF MILITARY POWER. THEIR  
COMBINED RESOURCES ARE SIMPLY TOO GREAT. A BETTER ROAD  
TO SECURITY LIES IN THE PEACEMAKING PROCESS THAT BEGAN  
WITH PRESIDENT SADAT'S TRIP TO JERUSALEM AND THE CARTER  
ADMINISTRATION SEEMS RIGHT IN CALCULATING THAT THE PRO-  
POSED AIRCRAFT SALE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THAT PROCESS BY  
STRENGTHENING A MODERATE SAUDI REGIME.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION TO WRAP ALL THE SALES INTO  
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AN ALL-OR NOTHING PACKAGE IS A HARD TACTIC TO OVERCOME  
THE PREDICTABLE RESISTANCE IN CONGRESS. IF THE SALES MAKE  
SENSE INDIVIDUALLY, THEIR JOINT PRESENTATION WILL BE  
DIPLOMATICALLY AS WELL AS POLITICALLY ADVANTAGEOUS. END  
TEXT. VANCE

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